THE EAGLE AND THE SERPENT ON THE SCREEN

The State as Spectacle in Mexican Cinema

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Abstract: Recent studies of the history of Mexican cinema continue to speak of the complex relations between the state and the film industry, and the most frequently analyzed aspects tend to be the same: the reach and forms of censorship, as well as the financial dependence on the state. To broaden this perspective, I propose a classification of cinematic discourses that represent the relations between film characters and state powers. I discuss four basic modes of representation that, determined by historical and economic circumstances, reflect and mediate the attitudes and dispositions of viewers toward the political regime. For each mode, I discuss a sequence in a paradigmatic film, analyzing visual and ideological aspects in relation to the political moment at the time of the film's release. Finally, I argue that, despite the resurgence of the Mexican cinema and a more critical tone in its approach to state institutions, fictional films still rest on indirect and allegorical representations of recent events. This is due to the uncertainty of the prolonged and still-incomplete transition to institutional democracy in Mexico.

For decades, one of the most common subjects in the literature on Mexican national cinema has been the tight relationship between the state and the film industry (Mora 1982, 59, 69; Noble 2005, 13–22; Paranaguá 2003, 221–225; Ramírez Berg 1992, 40, 44; Sánchez 2002). A general assumption in most of this criticism is that cinematographic expression has frequently evinced the manipulation or direct control of the government because of the economic dependence of this sector on the financial backing of the state. However, from a historical and comparative perspective, it is clear that this situation is not alien to most metropolitan film industries, including those of the United States, Germany, and France, which have been financially rescued, enticed to collaborate in war efforts, or managed by state institutions at some point in their history (Cook 2000, 11–14; Elsaesser 1989, 18–27; Williams 1992, 278, 395). Thus, however defining this tight collaboration could have been for Mexican cinema, it is not exactly a productive gesture to insist on overanalyzing its dependency on the state. Furthermore, from this traditional perspective, the possibility of reading and theorizing the relative autonomy achieved in the production of images in certain key historical moments is less likely to surface or might be ignored.

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To circumvent the shortfalls of some of these interpretations, I propose the exploration of Mexican cinematographic discourses from a different point of view.[1] Breaking with the tendency that seeks to establish when and how the state fosters or controls the production of images, I analyze the varieties and evolution of cinematic representations of the state on the screen.[2] Specifically, I focus on fiction film discourse to search for representations of practices of power and the deployment of historical narratives that support or question official versions of history. This new perspective aims to shed light on what the movie screens were really able to represent or reveal about the relationship between the state and cinematographic discourse and, more important, what spectators could see or learn about their own relationship with state institutions on the screen.

Since the introduction of sound, and especially since the inception of the golden age of cinema (1935–1955), it is possible to differentiate four constitutive discourses used to visually represent the Mexican state. The emergence of these discourses is politically and historically determined. However, once they become part of the repertoire of cinematographic field they are added to the possible visualizations already present. Thus, the following categories are chronologically organized by their time of inception, but through the years, some of these discourses have acquired a residual character that has allowed them to coexist with the emerging ones.

In a first instance, there is the mystifying-*indigenista* discourse, with images reproducing the aesthetic principles supported and promoted by governmental institutions and frequently in tune with the main tenets of the ideological apparatus of the revolutionary state (1920–1940), including a dogmatic deployment of national narratives based on the principles of *indigenismo* and *mestizaje* (Bonfil Batalla 1994, 166; Florescano 2005, 314, 319; Lomnitz 1992, 277, 279; Miller 1999, 138, 155).[3] In this sense, many films

1. I use the concept of cinematographic/cinematic discourse to designate not only the organization of the five different codes (image, sound, music, speech, text) in a film or group of films but also the form in which characters and narration represent the relations of power of the society in which a film is produced (Stam, Burgoyne, and Flitterman-Lewis 1992).

2. From the many possible options, I use a working definition of *state* derived from a contemporary relational perspective. In this article, the state is a social process structuring human communities with specific forms of domination related to social and capital reproduction. It presupposes individual, noncoercive subordination to a social arrangement with asymmetric power bonds but that ensures vital activity and material production for all. In its institutional expression, the state includes provisions for political, material, social, and economic reproduction of a social formation (see Roux 2005). In the article, the word *state* refers to these processes and to the institutions that make possible its existence. I use the word *government* when referring to specific regimes, characters, or personalities related to governmental tasks represented in the films.

3. The official national narrative after 1920 affirms that the deepest roots of the nation are located in the glorious indigenous past that the Spanish Conquest destroyed. The true

of this era incorporated elements of the 1920s' and 1930s' visual rhetoric that the Mexican muralists Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and José Clemente Orozco had introduced (Hershfield 1999a, 199b). Films marked by this telluric nationalism have as their precursors silent historical epics like Manuel Contreras Torres's *De raza azteca* (1921) and Guillermo Calles's *El indio yaqui* (1926) and *Raza de bronce* (1927) (García Riera 1998, 57–59). The footage Sergei Eisenstein took in his eighteen-month visit to Mexico in 1930–1932 gave a new impulse to the muralist and cinematic romanticization of the past and the present agrarian indigenous cultures and to the revolutionary struggle for their paternalist redemption (Coffey 2002; De la Vega Alfaro 1997; De los Reyes 2006; Podalsky 1993). In the sound era, early examples with Eisensteinian and muralist influence included Carlos Navarro's *Janitzio* (1934), Fred Zinnemann's Mexican film *Redes* (1936), and several of the early Emilio Fernández's films (García Riera 1998, 93; see also Coria 2005).

At the time of the decline of the golden age of Mexican cinema, by the early 1950s and all through the 1960s, many popular films disseminated what I consider the second discourse of cinematic representations of the state. Through a series of generic conventions and script formulas, the picaresque-folklorizing discourse dealt indirectly with the shortcomings and the gradual erosion of the revolutionary legacy (cf. Hernández Rodríguez 1999). An extensive complacency toward the increasingly authoritarian and paternalist practices of the government and its "modern" institutions marked the films categorized in this second discursive mode. Urban melodrama, *ranchera* comedy, and especially urban comic films by the three most important figures of the genre—Cantinflas (*Si yo fuera diputado*, 1952), Tin Tan (*Hay muertos que no hacen ruido*, 1946), and Clavillazo (*El genial detective Peter Perez*, 1952)—shared a common pattern of endlessly repeated jokes and tacit references to the corruption of government officials without ever formulating a direct critique of state institutions (cf. Monsiváis 1999).

The third mode of visual representation of the state emerged by the mid-1970s in part as a reaction to the tumultuous political events of 1968, which along with a crisis at the box office, provoked a change in the mode of film production and in the tone and reach of state representations. This third twist in cinematographic discourse coexists with the previous ones but challenges the outdated melodramatic and comic repertoire with a style veering toward a form of denunciatory realism. Stories and charac-

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Mexican identity emerges from the hybridization of these Spanish and indigenous roots in the mestizo people, who have created their own history through successive struggles of liberation and affirmation (e.g., independence, reform). All these elements are linked and acquired their final expression in the politics and culture that the revolutionary state (1920–1940) fostered (see Bonfil Batalla 1994).

ters in these spectacles reflected the growing disappointment that large sectors of the public felt toward Mexican society in general and the government of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) in particular. Films in this category include especially those produced by young directors: Raúl Araiza's *Cascabel* (1976), Felipe Cazals's *El apando* (1976) and *Las Poquianchis* (1976), and *Cadena perpetua* by Arturo Ripstein (1979), among others.

Finally, by the end of the 1990s—on the verge of the long political transition—the most recent mode of representation I analyze deploys what I call a demystifying realist discourse that playfully, and sometimes sarcastically, recasts previous conventionalisms and discourses with deconstructive or parodic intentions. Here, Luis Estrada's *La ley de Herodes* (1999) is paradigmatic and opens the door for other dark comedies and melodramas like Fernando Sariñana's *Todo el poder* (1999), *Pachito Rex* (2001) by Fabián Hoffman, and *Conejo en la luna* (2002) by Jorge Ramírez Suárez.

Throughout the history of film in Mexico, these four cinematographic discourses representing the state are kept alive in the collective imagination by the nostalgic rehash of some of its themes in successive films but especially by periodic reruns of the cinematic legacy in television and cable networks. Thus, even if their actuality as socially relevant narratives has been surpassed, certain tones and perspectives of the older discourses still reappear as distant references or become common substrata for the parodies of the postmodern gyrations of contemporary cinematic expression.

ANXIETY OF REPRESENTATION AND THE MYSTIFYING-INDIGENISTA DISCOURSE

Aside from some antecedents of official intervention in film production and exhibition during the silent era, one can argue that the actual involvement of the state in the fictional representation of national narratives and political practices on the screens starts with the dawning of the talkies (cf. De los Reyes 1996, 233; Schroeder 2008). A notable example of this is the first superproduction of Mexican cinema, Fernando de Fuentes's *Vámonos con Pancho Villa* (1935), a film that received not only material and logistic support from the army but also financial backing from the government of General Lázaro Cárdenas, to the point of rescuing the producers from bankruptcy given the poor return at the box office (Mraz 1997). Clearly, the legitimization of the image of the Mexican Revolution was at stake, and the government was interested in the enterprise. Through this financial intervention, it seems safe to assume that there was already a clear perception from the part of governmental officials of the high symbolic value of film as an instrument for the diffusion of ideologies and for

the dissemination of heuristic models for the reception of recent national history.[4]

The first visual discourse for the representation of the Mexican state on the screen emerges under these conditions in the early 1930s. The mystifying-indigenista moment of Mexican film coincides with the era of reaffirmation of the social imaginary of the Mexican Revolution. Its images are committed to the recuperation and mystification of the indigenous and mestizo roots of the nation. Associations of race and land with an indomitable and atavist identity, with physical strength, and with primitive beauty derived from Aztec or other indigenous heritage are some of the aspects highlighted in the characters and stories filmed under this perspective (Coffey 2002). Also, as most of the official activity and hegemonic ideology of that time, this was a cinema of modernization in which the rural environment was subject to the transforming will and direct material intervention of the state.

In general, in those films that actually portray high-placed officials or mention state institutions, there is often an emphasis on a symbolic closeness between everyday people and the government agents. These spectacles give visual expression to the official Bonapartism of that era.[5] Frequently, in these images the president (or other officials) and the peasant in the cornfield or the common man in the big city are represented as driven by the same nationalist sentiments and social goals. However, reality was much less harmonious. The construction of a complicated bureaucracy controlled by the highest officials and the cult of the personality of the president, as well as the accelerated formation of a new bourgeoisie, were widening the social and economic gap between the citizens and their representatives.

For all practical purposes, the period of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934–1940) was the last important moment of revolutionary transformation (Roux 2005, 209). The agrarian reform and the nationalization of the oil industry—beyond their justification or real value as successful economic projects—paved the way for the eventual corporatization of the peasant

4. Cinematic representations of the confrontation had little success during the 1920s (De los Reyes 1993, 230–234). However, during the Cárdenas administration (1934–1940) governmental institutions encouraged efforts to present and promote a sanitized narrative of the Mexican Revolution in textbooks and films that recuperated and elevated figures like Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata (Coffey 2002; Gilbert 2003; Katz 1998, 391)

5. In its classic definition, *Bonapartism* is the political practice of governing with the ideology of one class while serving the interests of another in relative autonomy of both (Bensussan and Labica 1999). In this case, Mexican governments after 1940 have identified themselves with the causes and ideology of the peasantry and the workers, but for the most part, they have served the interests of the industrial and financial classes while retaining increasingly autocratic powers.

and labor movements under the banner of the official party, the Partido de la Revolución Mexicana (renamed PRI in 1946) (Roux 2005, 213). By 1940, not without agitation and resistance from conservative sectors, workers and peasants had received—at least nominally—the first installments of the promises of the Mexican Revolution of 1910–1920. As compensation for these acts of economic justice, the state-organized corporatist regime would exact from the people—by coercion or connivance—the authority and legitimacy to support its increasingly authoritarian and corrupting practices (Aguirre and De la Peña 2006).

But the real turning point in the political and economic history of the postrevolutionary state would come with the office of Miguel Alemán from 1946 to 1952 (Meyer 2002). By that time, the perceived success of the import substitution industrialization strategy for development had made the Mexican political and economic elite believe that the moment of modernization and full capitalist transformation had finally arrived. From this point on, state relations were molded around an intricate network of clientelism, leadership subordination, and under-the-table negotiations with opposition groups. If those practices failed, the authority recurred periodically to police or—if need be—army repression (Aguirre and De la Peña 2006, 405, 439; Maldonado 2005; Roux 2005, 214–218). This complex arrangement was built into the political process and ritually renewed every six years. Not surprisingly, the cinematographic sector was also invited to participate in the economic and political transformation of the state. A support system for the advancement of the film industry was put in place, most notably a state-sponsored distribution company, and in 1947, the nationalized Banco Cinematográfico which was in charge of funding the production of films (Fein 1999; García Riera 1998, 151; Sánchez 2002, 90).

The intricate reactionary situation of this era can be read against the grain in the images of an important film of the Alemán presidential period. The 1948 film *Río Escondido*, directed by Emilio (Indio) Fernández and photographed by Gabriel Figueroa, melodramatically celebrates the everyday effects of revolutionary change at the precise moment that state institutions were about to neutralize or reverse some of the most important rights that worker and peasant unions had acquired in the national reconstruction process (from 1920 to 1940) (cf. Fein 1999).[6] In other words, while the monumental construction of highways, hydroelectric plants, stadiums, and airports is presented as direct fruit of the revolution, the

6. Although there are numerous earlier films displaying the mystifying-indigenista discourse, I have chosen to analyze *Río Escondido* for the international recognition the film received and because it belongs to a group of paradigmatic films in this category made by the well-known production team Emilio Fernández (director), Gabriel Figueroa (photographer), and Mauricio Magdaleno (screenwriter), and because it is widely available on VHS and DVD.

demands to achieve true democracy and the application of effective policies for social justice were indefinitely postponed.

Despite this overcast panorama in Mexican politics, in *Río Escondido*, Figueroa's camera presents an open romanticization of the activities of the national government. Right from the start, the opening and title sequences prominently display national symbols etched in engravings inspired by Rivera's murals, and the soundtrack, specially prepared by noted composer Silvestre Revueltas, establishes an unequivocal epic tone with resounding percussions in a symphonic march. Then, the first sequence of the actual film opens with a classic Figueroa frame composition: a high angle panoramic of the *zócalo* (national mall) with distant clouds making the background of a gigantic Mexican flag soaring in front of the National Palace.[7] The action moves inside the national buildings as a would-be rural teacher Rosaura (María Félix) rushes for an official audience with the president. As she passes through the hallways and conference rooms of the colonial palace, Rivera's frescoes "speak" in voice-off to the teacher, who in awe admires the monuments declared by the voice (of the nation?) as belonging to her and the people as "true inheritors of Mexico's history."

Almost at the end of the first sequence, President Alemán's shadowed profile appears standing proudly in an eye-level close-up (figure 1). It is precisely this structuring shadow-absence that directs the individual destinies of the characters of the film—and the spectator must assume—of the Mexican people in general, no matter how far from the center of power they might be located.[8] It was the president himself who called on Rosaura to help him in the national crusade for education. Humbly, on the verge of tears but not revealing her chronic heart condition—of which the spectators learn in the previous scene—the teacher accepts her mission. This highly emotional and acquiescent attitude toward the presidential figure is perhaps among the first cinematic renditions of the increasingly presidentialist penchant of PRI governments.[9]

7. In her work *Gabriel Figueroa: Nuevas perspectivas* (2008), Higgins discusses in detail the artistry and impact of Figueroa's technique in relation to the cinematography of his time.

8. I use the concept of spectator(s) to designate the subject or subjects who, having previous and diverse ideological baggage and aesthetic experiences, confront the images of a film and are in turn interpellated by the cinematic apparatus (Stam et al. 1992; Mayne 1993, 80–86). My comments assume that the social and political circumstances prevalent at the time of release of the films analyzed here conditioned the Mexican spectators. Accordingly, I offer one, sometimes two, possible interpretations that some spectators could have made of the scenes discussed here.

9. During and since the Alemán years, the Presidential Press Office has strictly managed the president's image. Furthermore, it became customary for newspapers and illustrated magazines to run photo essays flattering and praising the president and his political entourage as if they were film stars (see Mraz 2001).

Figure 1 Rural teacher Rosaura (María Félix) with the presidential shadow in Río Escondido *(Emilio Fernández, 1948).*

When Rosaura finally arrives at her remote teaching post, the visual composition establishes a strong contrast between local and central power. In the first sequence at the rural village, the local cacique and municipal president, Don Regino, demands to have a photo like the one "taken of *mi general* Pancho Villa when he entered Torreón." The cronies associated with this farcical despot are shown in a medium shot aligned to mark the depth of field and occupying the deserted space of the town's central plaza. In this site that was supposed to be devoted to civic assembly, his three subordinates attentively observe Don Regino savagely handling a black stallion. In the reaction shots, directly opposing this group but filling the frame in a similar way, one can also see three women dressed in black watching the horseman in complete silence.

The next shots in this scene—alternating among the cacique, the thugs, the women, and Rosaura—underline the other purpose of the improvised spectacle. The authority not only is posing for a photo but also is regimenting the gaze of men and women who are in turn construed as mere spectators in a theatrical reenactment of power relations. Their passivity and complicity toward the violent spectacle prefigure how, in this town, men and women—as the black stallion—are obliged to endure the moral,

corporal, and sexual abuse of Don Regino and his clan. Clearly, the good people of Río Escondido cannot expect the mediation or intervention of other powers of the state, such as the judicial or legislative branches, because they are not even mentioned. It is only the teacher Rosaura and Felipe (Fernando Fernández), the doctor, the two figures representing modernization, visually invested with the symbols and authority of the central government in the previous scenes, who can effectively oppose the despotic power of Don Regino.

The heavy ideological hand of the script reduces the conflict between central (modern-civil) and local (irrational-revolutionary) power to a confrontation of good versus evil.[10] Granted, this reductionist view served mostly a dramatic purpose in the film. Outside the theaters, everyday power relations in small towns were not as simple. The negotiation of political authority and federal intervention was more complex and nuanced than this, with traditional peasant or oligarchic groups eagerly competing for—and sometimes against—the legitimizing symbols and material benefits of the modernizing political and economic forces from the center (Lomnitz 1992, 143–150; Nugent and Alonso 1994, 232). But in Fernández's film, in its eagerness to promote the redemption of the indigenous people through state intervention (e.g., education, health care), the images are so biased against the local power that resistance to central authority is qualified as criminal. In one of his bouts of rage, Don Regino dares to challenge the presidential authority directly: "Here, there is no other president but me," he proclaims.

Ironically, in the current political system, the power of Don Regino and the power of "el señor Presidente" followed the same authoritarian and patrimonialist principles (Meyer 2005). Under the PRI governments, the will of the head of state had extensive reach and was considered absolute in some circles (Krauze 1997, 110). However, the film exalts the actions of the federal executive power and condemns those of the local authorities, despite that the former was effectively the basis and support of the whole system. In this way, the cinematographic representation of the state in *Río Escondido* ended up veiling the internal mechanisms of Mexican authoritarianism.

Although under a less Manichaean light, this mystifying-indigenista mode of representation of the relationship between the people and the state is at work in many films of the golden age. Productions with some variations of this visual and ideological construction include other fea-

10. Although Villa's historical persona never ceased to be popular among certain sectors, and this admiration was expressed in newspapers, novels, comics, and journals, a full official rehabilitation of his figure proved controversial. It was not until 1966 that the Mexican Congress finally inscribed his name in golden letters at its memorial wall (Katz 1998, 392–395).

tures by Emilio Fernández—*Flor silvestre* (1943), *María Candelaria* (1944), and *Maclovia* (1948)—and later works by Roberto Gavaldón, such as *El rebozo de Soledad* (1952), and Ismael Rodríguez's *Tizoc* (1952), among others. The action in many of these films is situated before the Revolution. This chronological substitution helped avoid offending any contemporary sensibilities and safely attributes the racist and classist "bad side" of power to the "oppressive and obscurantist" Porfirista dictatorship. Nonetheless, by the mid-1950s, with the partial success of modernization and constant efforts for urbanization, and once the legacy of the Revolution was extensively commodified and demagogically instrumentalized in the official rhetoric, the operability of the mystifying-indigenista discourse decreased.

The material aspect and demographics of the country changed rapidly after 1940 (García Martínez 2004, 95). It was the turn of urban narratives to deliver ideological conformity to the people following the developmentalist designs of the state. Urban, everyday heroes were celebrated in the melodramas starring young male leads such as David Silva and Pedro Infante. The comedies and melodramas of this period would recuperate and elevate the figure of poor, honest ordinary people of the city neighborhood, instead of the indigenous campesino paternalistically portrayed in productions set in rural environments. Certainly, the relationship between the urban characters—already transformed by the modernizing efforts of the state—and the government officials is less transparent. But "honest public servants," usually as poor as the film heroes, always upheld the principle of authority. The exploiters were then some member of an unscrupulous and retrograde rich family or a bad apple in the official sector. These dramatic and ideological elements reappeared with variations, in Rodríguez's *Nosotros los pobres* series (1948–1953), as well as in the social melodramas starring David Silva and Arturo de Córdoba (cf. Hernández Rodríguez 1999).

By 1955 and throughout the 1960s, film production in Mexico witnessed a process of quality decline. Hollywood, once again at full production, lost its interest in incentivizing Mexican cinema and its spectacles gradually regained screen time dominance. The Cinematographic Bank supported the cronyism of the few standing Mexican production and exhibition firms, thus allowing monopolistic control over the market by a small number of investors (De la Vega 1999; Sánchez 2002, 91). Commercialism and formulaic scripts took over the screens. Only occasional independent productions would shake Mexican cinema out of its lethargic state in the following fifteen years. However, one of the formulas developed earlier during this era had the seeds of a successful discourse of lighthearted criticism of certain state institutions. The second mode of visual discourse to represent the Mexican state was also born during the golden age but became dominant only after the decline of this period.

LAUGHING AROUND THE STATE: THE PICARESQUE-FOLKLORIZING DISCOURSE

In his seminal work *Fenomenología del relajo*, the Mexican philosopher Jorge Portilla (1918–1963) aimed to define some aspects of modern Mexican identities. In this regard, Portilla highlighted and extensively analyzed what he saw as a constitutive lack of seriousness toward some discourses and values. He thought the condition was part of a generalized strategy of the Mexican people to avoid frustration and confrontation. Some of the tactics displayed in this symbolic displacement of conflict included humorous games, double entendres, rambunctious or theatrical acts of evasion, and verbal excess that he recognized in the practice of *relajo* (goofing off): "The significance or sense of 'relajo' is to suspend seriousness; this is to say, suspend or annihilate the subject's adhesion to a [philosophical] value posed to his freedom" (Portilla 1984, 18).[11] For Portilla, relajo is displayed through three discernible moments: (1) a displacement of attention; (2) the assumption of a position of distance toward the proposed value, and (3) a specific action deploying gestures, words, and so on, by which the individual invites others to join her or him in the act of distancing from the confronted value. In my opinion, Portilla's hermeneutic analysis described with accuracy the interaction of the individual with state institutions and state officials in films by the comedian Mario Moreno "Cantinflas."

The deployment of this mode of representation can be traced back to the last sequence of one of the earliest Cantinflas classics: *Ahí está el detalle* (Juan Bustillo Oro, 1938). The picaresque do-it-all character Mario Moreno plays is accused of killing a known brigand by the name of Bobby. Following the structure of a comedy of errors, the spectator knows that there are two victims by the same name: an extortionist and a house dog. In the first sequence of the film, at the behest of the house maid, Cantinflas has indeed killed the animal and openly admits to it before the court. Inexplicably, in the courtroom, everybody thinks of him as an unrepentant and cynical assassin because of the mistaken identity of the victims. Trying to defend his actions, with a mixture of significant key legal terms and half concepts tossed in the middle of incomplete phrases with syncopated syntax, Cantinflas ends up amusing the jury, judge, and councilors. The logic of relajo is applicable here. The camera dwells on medium shots of the accused to foreground his body language and then cuts to general shots of the court—as if it were a theatrical audience—to reveal the effects of his disruptive acts and words (figure 2). Cantinflas's verbal gymnastics and comic presence effectively distract the judge and the jury from their work and redirect the attention of the public on both sides of the screen toward his performance. His lack of respect for the seriousness and values

11. My translation.

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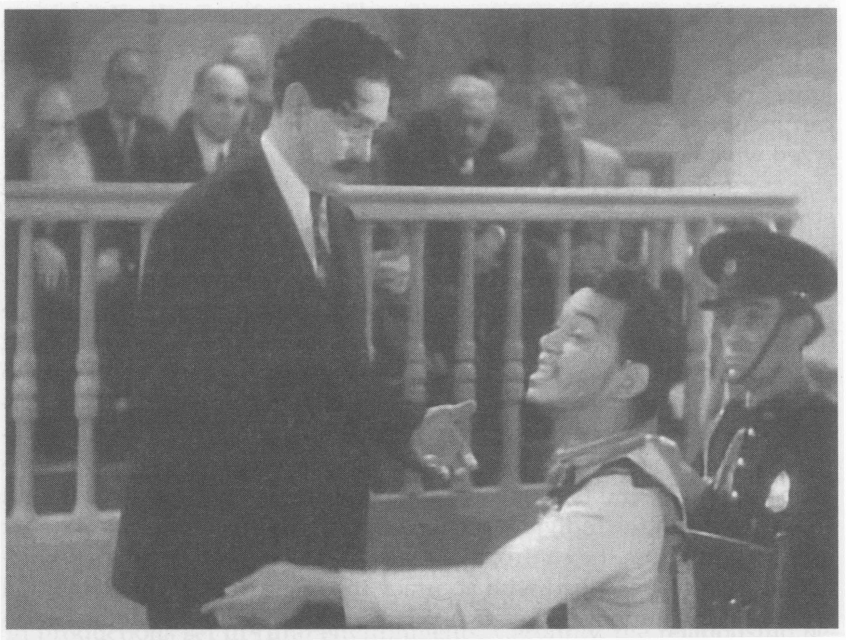

Figure 2 Cantinflas disrupts a trial in Ahí está el detalle *(Juan Bustillo Oro, 1938).*

of the court are evident through his indiscriminate verbal sparring with the people's attorney, his public defender, and by insistently disrupting the judge's control of the court room. This situation ends up distancing everybody from the legal protocol, thus thwarting the semiosis of legal discourse and the effective application of judicial due process. By the end of the sequence, the judge, the people's part, and the defense mimic and reproduce Cantinflas's speech acts and effectively participate in *cantinfleo*—as this form of discourse is officially termed in Spanish language dictionaries (see Stavans 1998). Through these tactics, clearly following the three stages of relajo, the scene humorously subverts a trial, one of the most important moments for the materialization of the legal system and the actualization of judiciary practices, both fundamental elements of the state reproduction process.

But the effect is momentary. As it happens in many comedies, relief arrives soon enough while the injustice of societal rules stays intact, albeit this seems to hurt less when all are laughing about it. Apparently, it was not of the jury's concern that the authority has unjustly accused a man of murder lacking the necessary evidence or without the police conducting even an elemental search of facts. It is also remarkable that the jury was ready to sentence to death an illiterate and destitute man without the means to cooperate in his legitimate defense. Outside the theater, similar

irregularities in the judicial due process were so frequently making the headlines in the daily press and in the goriest pages of yellow journalism that these situations in the film might have seemed "natural" for many spectators (cf. De los Reyes 1993, 79).

Throughout the four decades after its inception in the late 1930s, the picaresque figure central to this mode of state representation would assume different forms and, in time, touch riskier and grimmer contexts. By the 1970s and 1980s, the innocuous and endearing characters of Cantinflas's comedies were transformed into pimps and alcoholics in sexploitation brothel melodramas and comedies of *ficheras* (hookers) or became minor drug dealers and petty criminals in *fronterizo* B movies (Iglesias Prieto 2000; Sánchez 2002, 179).[12] In some of these films, the main character could also be a concerned citizen motivated by revenge or could become an iteration of a social bandit of urban or rural origin (Aviña 2004, 231; Benamou 2009).[13] Language turns toward foul forms of address and generously displays *albur*, a form of verbal innuendo and gender aggression that effectively substitutes the florid tactics of cantinfleo (cf. Pilcher 2001, 10).

One possible explanation for the long-lasting popularity of these films among Mexican audiences, and specifically among the population on the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, is that by challenging the hypocritical appropriation of moral values and national symbols by state officials, and by standing against the exploitative practices of the repressive state apparatus (e.g., police, border patrol), the *pícaro*/petty drug dealer as a new social bandit acquired a transgressive character that enhanced his or her appeal among the marginalized Mexican and Mexican American spectatorship of the 1970s and 1980s (Benamou 2009). Simulation, double entendre, and sexual innuendos as symbolic acrobatics helped the transient individual get even or, better yet, take revenge against a political system based on impunity, bribery, and nepotism. These films offered an imaginary relief from the increasing anxieties suffered under an institutional arrangement firmly encroached on the people and that was invariably on the side of the rich and powerful. Whatever the context, the labor of the pícaro had the same limited objective, to circumvent the obstacles and impose his or her desire or will, and to take physical or symbolic revenge on state officials. Never a real protest or a concerted social reaction or political opposition against the whole regime is shown as an option in these piquant barroom tales. Nonetheless, the need to circulate representations of

12. Films defining the fichera genre include two features by Miguel M. Delgado: *Bellas de noche* (1975) and *Las ficheras (Bellas de noche 2)* (1977). Delgado directed most of Cantinflas's films after *El gendarme desconocido* (1941).

13. The social-avenger figure is central to the *Lola la trailera* border series featuring the popular actress Rosa Gloria Chagoyán (see Benamou 2009).

discontent freely and fully was emerging and would find partial relief in the dominant discursive mode of the 1970s.

SNAPSHOTS OF THE AUTHORITARIAN STATE; OR, HOW TO REPRESENT POLITICAL REPRESSION WITHOUT CONSEQUENCES

At first sight, it seems paradoxical that the same political elite that allowed the buildup of military force leading to the Tlatelolco massacre in 1968 and the Jueves de Corpus paramilitary violence of 1971 in the next presidential period became the foremost promoter of cinematographic free expression. Paradox or not, the films of this decade were tooled with a different stance toward authority and threw a veritable critical eye on some of the grimmest aspects of state institutions. Moreover, most texts studying the history of Mexican national cinema coincide in recognizing the period 1970–1976 as a second golden age with an exceptional set of circumstances allowing for the emergence of a new Mexican cinema (Maciel 1999; Menne 2007; Mora 1982, 120–121; Noble 2005, 111; Ramírez Berg 1992, 46–50).

From a comparative point of view, the Mexican cinema of the 1970s was more in tune with international currents than criticism on the period has recognized so far. Echoes of a cold look at a stagnant middle class from the French *nouvelle vague* can be seen in some Mexican comedies and urban dramas.[14] The ripple effect of the new Latin American cinema with its denunciatory and anti-imperialist language reached some of these films, too.[15]

The decade starts with a renovated impulse to film production due to three main factors: (1) the renewed and intensified participation of the state in the film sector, (2) the influence of formal film education, and (3) the emergence of an experimental and ambitious generation of young directors (García Riera 1998, 259, 278–279; Mora 1982, 114; Ramírez Berg 1992, 46). Many were the interesting new voices emerging in this period, but the most influential directors who started or consolidated their career

14. Aside from the different levels of success and experimental quality of both national cinemas, I think the despondency with which *Weekend* (1967) and *2 où 3 choses que je sais d'elle* (1967), by Jean-Luc Godard, and François Truffaut's early installments of the *Antoine Doinel* series depicted the French middle class had an equivalent in the ironic treatment of the Mexican lower and middle classes in films by Luis Alcoriza (*Mecánica nacional*, 1972), Jaime Humberto Hermosillo (*La pasión según Berenice*, 1976), and Jorge Fons (*Los albañiles*, 1976).

15. In my opinion, few Mexican directors displayed the same ideological pugnacity of Armando Solanas, Octavio Getino, and Fernando Birri in Argentina or of Leon Hirszman and Glauber Rocha in Brazil, but the strong criticism of capitalist underdevelopment and some visual elements of the new Latin American cinema are present in films like *Cascabel* (1976), by Raúl Araiza, and *Oficio de tinieblas* (1978), by Archibaldo Burns, among many others.

at this time included Raúl Araiza, Alfonso Arau, Jorge Fons, Felipe Cazals, Jaime Humberto Hermosillo, Paul Leduc, Arturo Ripstein, and Marcela Fernández Violante.

If the nationalization of the Banco Cinematográfico in 1947 ensured certain privileges in the overseeing and control of the production of film to the Mexican government, nothing would indicate that the creation of a whole array of industrial structures under the government of Luis Echeverría (1970–1976) had a different objective. However, this time under the direction of Rodolfo Echeverría—actor, producer, and brother of the president—the Banco Cinematográfico offered extensive financial support and broader creative freedom to most parties involved in the production of cinematic spectacles. The state not only was instrumental in the organization of the film school Centro de Capacitación Cinematográfica (1975) but also founded three film production companies: Conacine for high-production-value projects and Conacite I and II for more commercial and popular spectacles. All three production companies shared control of the industry with the directors' guilds and the film workers' unions. Furthermore, in response to the block-booking practices of exhibitors—who often neglected or outright refused to screen Mexican films—the government increased its participation in the distribution and exhibition side of the business to the point of eventually becoming the actual owner of a large chain of exhibition venues (Mora 1982, 114–115; Ramírez Berg 1992, 44; Rossbach and Canel 1988).[16]

A common denominator to some of the most salient cinematic spectacles of the decade is the frequent representation of what Michel Foucault (1984) called heterotopias of deviation. These spaces may or may not be physically isolated from social contact, but they become the formal repositories of the antisocial, criminal, or mentally disturbed elements of society. The obvious models are, of course, prisons and mental institutions. Accordingly, Cazals's *El apando* (1976) and Ripstein's *Cadena perpetua* (1979) are paradigmatic examples of visual investigations on an heterotopia of deviation, both of which cast a realist glimpse at the dismal conditions in the infamous Mexican penitentiary system (Quezada 2005, 100, 112, 125). But many other films take on other social institutions and show them as metaphors or actual spaces of deviancy. Family, school, and church are represented as isolating sites of psychological torture and physical violence. Cazals's *Canoa* (1975) and Araiza's *Cascabel* (1976) presented remote

16. The López Portillo presidency, from 1976 to 1982, almost completely undid the ambitious film policy of the 1970–1976 regime. Yet some elements of the state-owned production infrastructure survived for a while. Because of this tenuous continuity, the group of young and seasoned directors favored under the previous period was able to release ongoing projects and, in some cases, continue their careers with new projects, albeit with less and less official support.

communities as loci of murderous fanaticism or exploitation. A production attacking the supposed Catholic piety and solidarity of the provincial family revealed as a hypocritical structure of sexual repression and greed was Hermosillo's *La pasión según Berenice* (1976). Acquiring the form of a dark domestic fable, Ripstein's *Castillo de la pureza* (1973) offered a perturbing rendition of the true possibilities of abusive patriarchal authority and domestic violence.

Among the films with the most enduring impact from this era is Cazals's *El apando* (1976), based on a short story by the prominent novelist, screenwriter, and notorious activist José Revueltas.[17] The film accurately portrays the squalor in which a trio of petty criminals survives while doing time in the isolation units of a Mexico City prison. These cells were popularly called *el apando* and the prisoners retained inside, the *apandados*. Certainly, this was not the first or the last film to depict these infamous institutions. What makes Cazals's approach interesting is the detailed and no-less-brutal portrayal of the sexual, medical, institutional, and physical abuses practiced on the bodies of all parties involved. Violence from prisoner to prisoner, from lovers to partners, from sons to mothers, from guards to inmates and back is on the rise in a gory escalation of aggressive behavior. The last sequence presents the unsuccessful plot by the prisoners Albino (Salvador Sánchez) and Polonio (Manuel Ojeda) to make their two girlfriends and the mother of their suicidal "friend" and addict El Carajo (José Carlos Ruiz) smuggle drugs inside the prison. The action unfolds like this: At the insistence of the women who are inciting the crowd of visitors to shout for the release of the apandados, the guards conduct three prisoners and three female visitors to the vestibule adjacent to the visiting area. There, Albino and Polonio, apparently unprovoked, unleash their deep-seated hatred of authority and end up beating to a pulp several guards and the prison warden. The sequence's tension grows when the remaining prison personnel hastily, but clumsily, try to contain the brawl by introducing iron bars across the cell until the wounded guards lie unconscious on the floor while the prisoners are strung up in midair, drenched in blood, and almost impaled by the dozens of bars immobilizing their every limb as pinned insects. The film ends with a freeze-frame medium shot on one of the prisoners, stiffened and bleeding but still grunting in rage (figure 3).

The brutality of the last scene serves well the film's critical perspective toward authority but introduces certain ambiguities toward its supposed denunciatory purpose. On the one hand, spectators could read the rampant violence and generalized corruption of the prison as a metaphor for the actual repressive state formation in which they live. After the bloody events of 1968 and 1971, large sectors of the labor and student movement

17. Revueltas participated as screenwriter or adapter in twenty-four film productions.

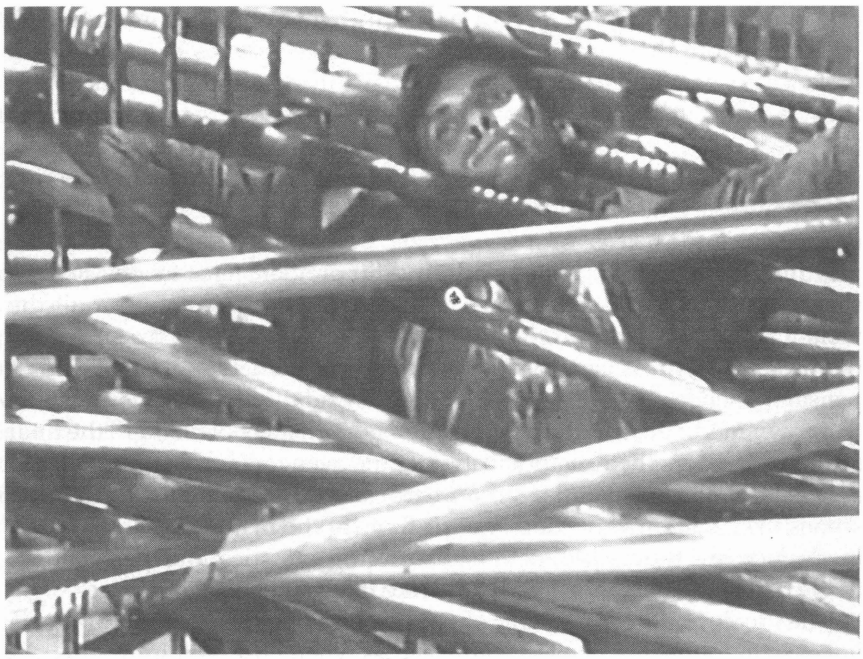

Figure 3 Inmate Polonio (Manuel Ojeda) brutally subdued in El apando *(Felipe Cazals, 1976).*

felt the repressive forces, local and federal, had chosen them as targets with the intention of isolating and containing them. For the most part, the mass media, especially radio and television, were willing to mask or outright ignore the aggressive response of the state to all forms of social protest (Fernández 2005; Glockner 2007, 291). Thus, in Cazals's film, the actual scenes in which six members of the lower classes—represented rather as lumpen proletariat—were able to "avenge" the humiliations and long-accumulated offenses might have some cathartic effect among certain urban audiences that witnessed or endured the increased levels of social violence. On the other hand, as it was often the case in the films of this era, there was a redirection of the denunciatory tone toward an ideological recuperation favoring the perspective of the authority and ultimately legitimating the actions of the state.

In the first sequences, Albino and Polonio attract a tense sympathy from the spectator, given the harsh environment in which they try to survive. Midway in the film there is also a comic-erotic relief when the camera follows the compadres in a long reverie, imagining and lusting over their women in nude scenes. But all these identificatory lures for the audience ultimately crumble when they intensify the abuse toward their weakened

cellmate El Carajo. The spectator learns that the "friends" are incapable of compassion; they are in fact construed as bootstraps of institutional violence passing the aggression from the institution to their cellmate and everybody around. The tension grows because spectators are agonizing at the possibility of seeing the dominant characters finally crush El Carajo, whom his comrades would have beaten to death earlier in the film were it not for his usefulness in their crude plan to become drug smugglers inside the prison.

If the clear dominance of melodramas in previous eras made Mexican spectators hope for a clean moral teleology with punishment for all the violent and evil doers, and rewards of freedom and love for the suffering, then Cazals's film is clearly not providing the elements for such a compensatory scheme.[18] As it seems, the guards and warden receive a taste of their own medicine, but the brutality and gory display of blood in the final sequence renders the romanticization of the avengers impossible. Polonio and Albino are not popular urban heroes like those depicted in prison scenes in Gavaldón's and Rodríguez's films of the mystifying-indigenista mode, nor are they social activists suffering injustice and persecution; they are urban miscreants ready to strike if left unchecked.

The ideological recuperation of these images by the state apparatus is not easy to follow but comes cleanly across when observed in context. As the demagogic slogan of the second regime of the 1970s expressed "la corrupción somos todos" (we all take part in corruption), the overall effect of the films of this era is an attempt to create a level playing field in the political arena.[19] True, the apparently daring narratives point out the problems of the regime and their images critically represent police brutality, but in the end, if students, activists, or inmates "provoke" the violence, then nobody is innocent. Following this normative logic, the state has the moral obligation to preserve governability and restore order. Thus, it is not surprising that after the townspeople and the fanatical priest have killed some of the students in Cazals's *Canoa*, it is none other than the army that saves the day. It is suspiciously ironic—if not cynical—that the victims are saved in the nick of time by the same repressive institution that massacred their peers eight years earlier in Tlatelolco (Mraz 1984; see also Hegarty 2007).

Whatever ideological maneuvers spectators and critics could, in hindsight, read in the body of officially supported films of the 1970s, one cannot lose sight of the tremendous gains in terms of social relevance attained

18. Despite the great success of other genres during the golden age, after its decline, it was clearly melodrama that captured the broadest public and continued to grow in the preference of spectators (De la Peza 1998). For a historical and comparative analysis of the evolution of this genre in international cinema, see Landy (1991).

19. The slogan was part of a public campaign against corruption. The idea behind the phrase was that the government and citizens had to recognize that corrupt behavior was present in private and public life and that its eradication required a common effort.

by cinematic productions during this era. A sharp and realistic turn in cinematic representation is perhaps the most important contribution of the denunciatory-realist discourse. Missing was a perspective for the future, a ray of hope or a call for the transformation of the relations between state and society, between individual and government. A cry for justice is not the same as a call for democratic action.

From a public policy perspective, a degree of state self-criticism on the screen made sense for a regime striving to recover certain levels of legitimacy after the preceding political turbulence. The cosmetic changes implemented during this decade, including the legalization of political parties from the left and the possibility of obtaining some funding and minimal representation at the National Congress, attest to the urgency with which the central power wanted to diffuse the possibility of violent uprising (Alonso and Rodríguez Lapuente 1990; Meyer 2002). Under these circumstances, an active sponsorship of media production from film to television was indispensable, and the effort paid off handsomely (cf. Orozco 2002, 217). The PRI governments were able to extend the regime for thirty more years despite a covert and always-publicly-denied dirty war. The violence and durable effects of those events were almost completely erased from public discussion until the following century (Glockner 2007, 11–15).

The partial political opening promoted at this point allowed for some degree of representation of party politics, and the corrupt ways of the one-party system were by then less controversial to portray in cinematic spectacles. For instance, a characteristic combination of the residual picaresque and the new denunciatory discourse was applied in comedies like Alfonso Arau's *Calzonzin inspector* (1974), Alejandro Galindo's *Ante el cadáver de un líder* (1974), and Julián Pastor's *El héroe desconocido* (1981). A handful of dramas ventured in the inspection of mythologies and traditions of political succession: Rafael Baledón's *Renuncia por motivos de salud* (1976) and Alejandro Pelayo's *La víspera* (1982). If film directors seemed increasingly more comfortable portraying the flaws in the political system, it was because they chose to use allegorical representations or, as in the past, indirect references to specific powers of the state.

GENERIC APORIA AND DARK HUMOR, A DEMYSTIFYING DISCOURSE FOR A NEOLIBERAL ERA

The comedic or dramatic recourse to a diluted ideological debate about the decline and slow disintegration of the PRI governments on screen finally acquires some substance in the following decade through the last mode of cinematic representation I propose in my analysis. The last three PRI regimes gradually dismantled the effective intervention of the state in the media and communications sector. The presidential period from

1982 to 1988 was the first one to foster the implementation of neoliberal economic and political practices (Ávila 2006, 53–86). An acute disinvestment in cultural projects dominated this phase, a situation that eventually led to the outright privatization of culture (Lomnitz 2008). The production and exhibition of Mexican film was no exception, and industry output fell dramatically (Alvaray 2008). Transnational distributors and their associated exhibitors saturated the market, and Mexican cinema practically disappeared from the screens.

By the mid-1990s, when the sector regained some stability and the state again made marginal contributions to film production funds through the Instituto Mexicano de Cinematografía (IMCINE) and the Fondo de Inversión y Estímulos al Cine (Fidecine),[20] given the diminished governmental involvement it was likely that Mexican producers and directors expected a less stringent censorship. As a positive sign, controversial films like *Rojo amanecer* (1988) by Jorge Fons and *El bulto* (1992) by Gabriel Retes, both of which openly discuss the Tlatelolco and Jueves de Corpus incidents, had to wait for a cool down process of censorship but were in the end released for the customary short run on a limited number of screens in Mexico City (see Aviña 2004, 42; Velazco 2005). These fiction films and other documentaries on the subject made strides in the critical representation of the state by showing for the first time direct army and police involvement in the repression of students and other activists of the previous era (De la Mora 2006; Velazco 2005). However, Fons's and Retes's works did not diverge significantly enough from the denunciatory mode of the 1970s, because they do not show the inner workings of the one-party system and its wide net of complicities, a challenge the emerging demystifying-realist discourse would take head on.

Perhaps the film best exemplifying the new mode of representation was Luis Estrada's *La ley de Herodes* (1999). The greatest irony of this film is that while the last PRI regime of the twentieth century, Ernesto Zedillo's government (1994–2000), publicly touted its renewed commitment to freedom of expression, the film authorities at IMCINE—still unsure about the room to maneuver cinematographic representation really had—unsuccessfully tried to delay its release (Velazco 2005). After all, this was the first film in years to offer direct political commentary, referring to historical figures and parties by name.

Most critics see in this film a daring effort to reveal the mechanisms of the Mexican political system:

20. The first neoliberal government created IMCINE and Fidecine after the privatization of the state film conglomerate in 1983. Although funding of the organizations has been erratic and meager, their support to the film sector helped the slow and gradual reconstruction of the industry to its present condition.

In this farcical portrayal of the PRI nation, nobody escapes unscathed. The Constitution ruling the country, emerging from the revolutionary struggle of 1910, becomes an instrument of control: it is the repository of norms that the powerful never follow but effectively use to exert impunity. From the municipal power, the parish, and the brothel, citizens are dispossessed and their resources feed fortunes. (Velazco 2005, 75)[21]

Certainly, Estrada's film represents a remarkable turning point in Mexican cinematography: it was the first time in seventy years that the two main parties, PRI and Partido Acción Nacional (PAN), are directly addressed and criticized. However, there was still a dodging act of indirect cinematic representation. Because the events portrayed in the film correspond to another historical era, the lens of 1999 again renounces a direct confrontation of its historical moment by building an allegoric plane anchored in the era of President Alemán (1946–1952) (cf. Aviña 2004, 45). That is to say, *Río Escondido* and *La ley de Herodes* share the same historical referent, although neither assumes full responsibility for directly criticizing its corresponding political conjuncture (cf. Rangel 2006).

La ley de Herodes narrates the toils and tribulations of Juan Vargas, a happy-go-lucky petty officer of the PRI. The initial sequences seem to put him in a similar situation to that of the picaresque figure of previous decades. With a fundamental difference, now the pícaro embodies the power of the state. Thus, instead of innuendos and double entendres with a comic resolution peppering the narrative, as in the folklorizing-picaresque discourse, it is dark humor, parody, and the grotesque that make this film a catalog of the sins and crimes of the official party. Also very important, and an element that distinguishes these images from previous representations, is a darkening of the comic situations and a characteristic use of film noir lighting and editing. The combination of these elements ends up placing the spectators in a generic aporia. For a good part of the film, spectators cannot decide whether they are watching a comedy or a drama until the violence and the excesses of the character have taken over his caricaturesque representation.

Vargas starts the film as a figure worthy of commiseration and a source of spectatorial identification for his simplicity and eagerness to serve. But little by little, the main character becomes an aberration. The turning point seems to be the sequence in which the petty officer, enticed by a party leader, arbitrarily applies the state and federal law in preposterous schemes of racketeering and extortion. A curious exchange of gifts characterizes the sequence presenting this transformation. Vargas pays a visit to the capital city and brings a piglet as a present for the party leader, who ends up reciprocating with a gun and a copy of the constitution, plus the express instruction to use both "at his convenience" (figure 4). Once the

21. My translation.

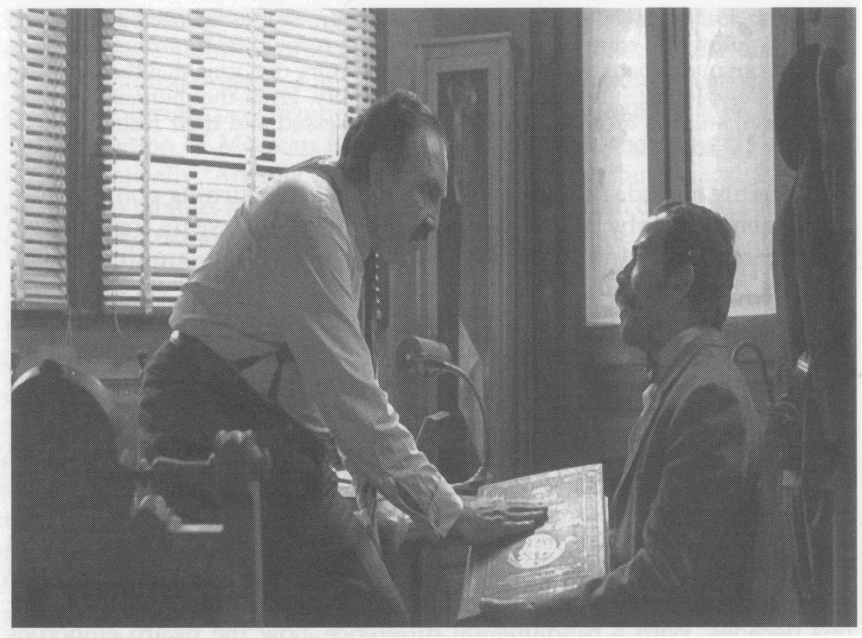

Figure 4 Vargas (Damián Alcázar) receives from his boss (Pedro Armendariz Jr.) a copy of the Constitution to use "at his convenience" in La ley de Herodes *(Luis Estrada, 1999).*

small-town municipal president is authorized by the party leadership to be corrupt, he quickly passes from victim to victimizer. This turn in the dramatic construction of Vargas heightens the ambiguity of his character and leaves the spectator to dwell in an emotional and generic confusion.

If the emotional teleology of melodrama in a soap opera trains spectators to laugh and cry alternatively, with situations clearly delimited by extradiegetic sound, these certainties are nowhere to be found in the film. In *La ley de Herodes*, spectators listen to a casual musical score with tropicalized and mellow tunes while facing the grotesque images of the political and human degradation of Juan Vargas. So, they end up not knowing whether to cry or laugh. According to Bakhtin (1984), one of the main functions of the grotesque is to degrade what is considered high and powerful to restore the sense of equilibrium while confronting the terror of natural forces. But the effort demanded from the spectator here is considerable; the drama goes from rags to riches, but the apparent improvement has the caveat of a spiraling moral degradation. The assassinations Vargas perpetrated, his disgrace as a cuckold husband, and the prostitution of his good intentions leave the spectator without the possibility of catharsis; the spectator never reaches a new equilibrium.

The represented state in this film acquires the dimensions of a perverse black box, absorbing misery and ejecting not poor and marginal beings sublimated in images with tragic undertones—like in the mystifying-indigenista discourse—but producing gleeful cynical monsters. The recurrent presence of farm pigs in the frame functions as a visual Greek chorus announcing what will become of those who dare to enter the infamous path of political power (Velazco 2005). The photographic style of film noir, with its lateral and low key lighting producing pronounced shadows, generates a criminalized image of the political system never before presented with such precision. Vargas, ably played by Damián Alcázar, first becomes an apprentice and then embodies the very system of destitution and corrupt practices the spectators easily recognize. This pessimistic view is what confers validity to the film. Such a direct commentary on the contorted practices of power was unthinkable ten years before, when *Rojo amanecer* or *El bulto* had appeared.

In terms of the representation of the state, this film becomes a catalog of the different modes discussed here and then furthers its reach with a parodic demystifying effect. To be sure, the historical setting of the action in the late 1940s and the initial comic construction of the main character are clear references to the periods of mystification and picaresque representation. The denunciatory realism and sexualized comedy of the 1970s and 1980s are hinted at in the political and personal degradation of Vargas. Finally, the generic aporia allows for the clear dominance of the dark humor and sarcastic views of the demystifying discourse of the 1990s and early 2000s.

At the turn of the millennium, some other productions featured the demystifying realist discourse, but it was far from becoming a dominant mode. True, under the current resurgence of Mexican film, hailed by some as a second new wave, the screens are definitely presenting an ironic and disaffected view of Mexican society (Amaya and Senio 2007; Menne 2007). But even if *Amores perros* (2000) and *Y tu mamá también* (2001) give few glimpses into the renegotiated relationships between citizens and social institutions, they do not substantively touch political realities. These films are—one way or another—repeating and mixing certain elements of the picaresque and denunciatory discourses without fully adopting the new demystifying dynamics.

Almost at the end of the first decade of the Mexican political transition, we are still waiting for fiction films to expose in greater depth the corrupt ways and massive economic and political crimes of the old and new political class. Certainly, other films have tried to reproduce and expand the daring discourse inaugurated by *La ley de Herodes*: dramas of transnational conspiracy like *Conejo en la luna* (Jorge Ramírez Suárez, 2004), dark humor parodies like *Todo el poder* (Fernando Sariñana, 2000), *Pachito Rex* (Fabián Hoffman, 2001), and the sequel to Luis Estrada's first film *Un*

mundo maravilloso (2006), but none has gone beyond the surprising and brilliantly sarcastic moment of demystification and refreshing defiance offered by *La ley de Herodes*.

Nonetheless, as do other critics and observers of the new spectacles, I still hope cinematic discourse in fiction film will continue its development, expanding previous or devising new visual modes to address the state, and that during the present reemergence of Mexican cinema, directors and producers will finally gather the strength to directly confront recent history, and claim the freedom, to criticize political reality face to face.

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